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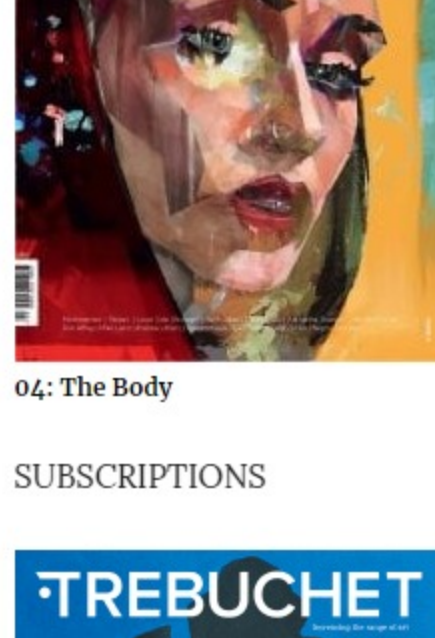
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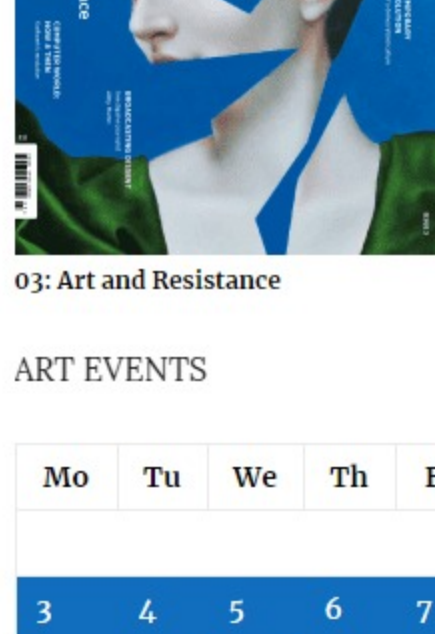
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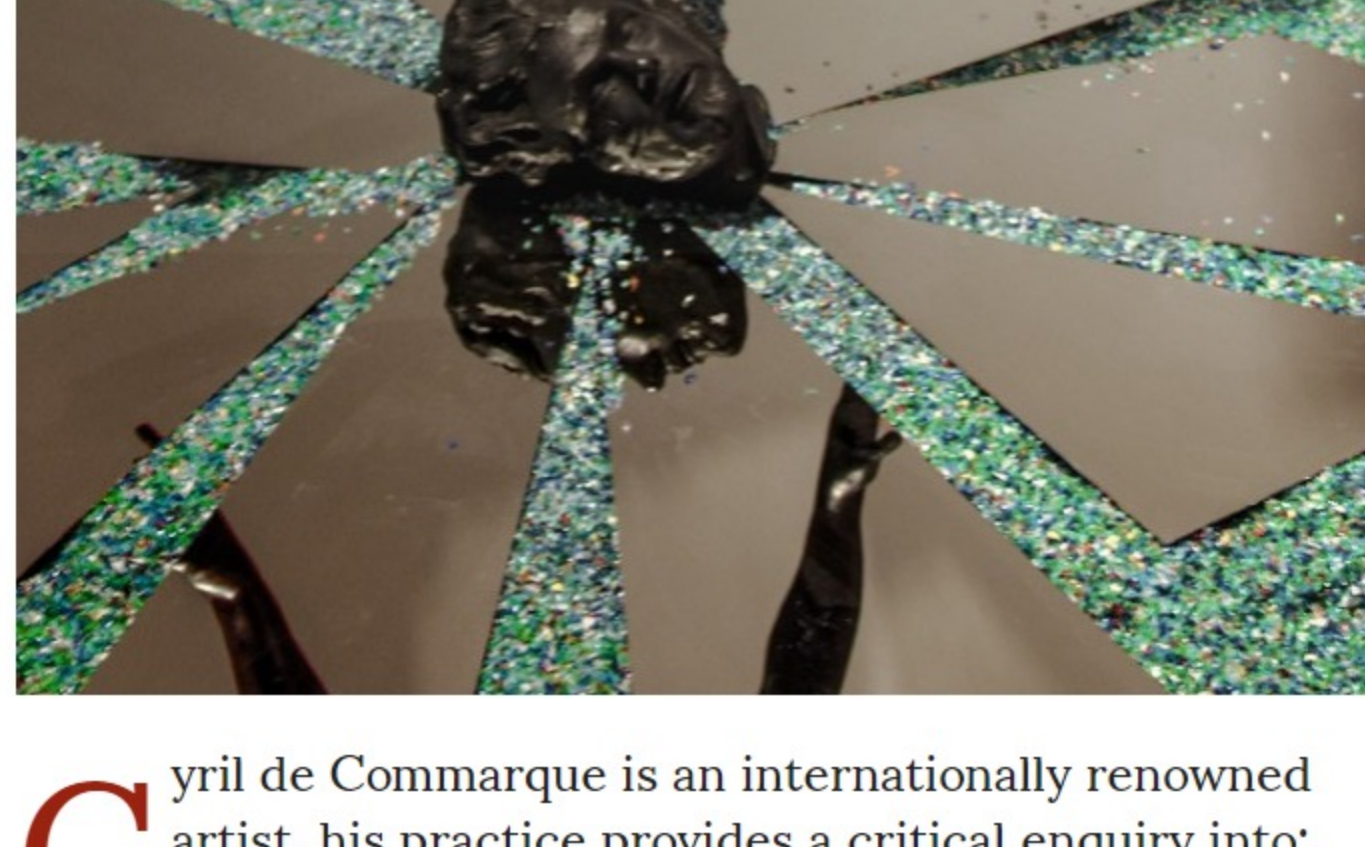
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Cyril de Commarque Interview

THREATS & OPPORTUNITIES IN THE ANTHROPOCENE AGE

© 26/10/2019 Michael Eden In Art



Cyril de Commarque is an internationally renowned artist, his practice provides a critical enquiry into: technology, political discourse and action as well as the existential threats facing modern humans in the Anthropocene age. His installations are challenging and cathartic, providing immersive experience for the audience and drawing on personal and societal symbolism to layer meaning.

De Commarque is showing work at the Saatchi Gallery *Artificialis* runs from 2 November – 1 March 2020. The artist shares his thoughts with Trebuchet and his candour recalls the radical interventions of the pre-cynical art keen to be included in the fight for a progressive and hopeful future.

Interview

M.E: My first thoughts when looking at the work (in *Artificialis*) was to recall 'Ozymandias' by Shelly especially when looking at *Lovers of Pompeii* (2019) and *ORO* (2019),

I met a traveller from an antique land
 Who said: 'Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
 Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
 Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
 And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
 Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
 Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
 The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed:
 And on the pedestal these words appear:
 'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
 Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!'
 Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
 Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
 The lone and level sands stretch far away. (Shelley, 1818)

These works seem to be portents or warnings as the 'shattered visage' is for Shelly and although the figures in the installation are not so arrogant or imposing as the poet's pharaoh I wondered if we are all like Ozymandias to an extent, with our hyper individualised bubbles and concerns. I wondered firstly if this observation chimes with your own motivations when considering the 'Anthropocene' and if you see the effects as pessimistically as I'm implying?



Portrait of Cyril de Commarque. Photo - Jean-Baptiste-Hygn.

Cyril: This poem is beautiful. I cannot get over our incredible disrespect for future generations rights, it is the first time in human history that we have the capacity to put in doubt the next generations life (as we know it) so yes there is a fundamental temptation for pessimism in our time, and a nostalgia. However, on the other hand there is a fantastic possibility to reinvent our codes, a renaissance...For ORO, I used my daughter in order to question our relation to the Anthropocene and our future, to engage with the incredible opportunity our generations have. All come back to Joseph Beuys proposal "La rivoluzione siamo noi!"



La Rivoluzione Siamo Noi (1972) 'We are the Revolution' (YouTube Still)

The incredible aspect of this evolution, the level of information and communication offer us the power of change (Cyril de Commarque)

M.E: *Le Marseillais* (2019) would appear to be a direct reference to the hanged man in tarot, and on first reading would also appear to be a critical portrait of modern man, the symbolism though of the tarot card is ambiguous; sometimes alluding to treachery and sometimes to higher learning. In your work the suspended figure has also lost his head which has seemingly smashed the ground below I wonder if you could say more about this and the relevance of the title?



Lovers of Pompeii (detail), 2019, HDPE recycled plastic, stainless steel polished mirror, 2.2 x 0.6 x 0.8 m. Courtesy the artist.

Cyril: I like the duality in the symbology of the *Marseillais*, we are all this paradox, informed, tempted but yet in protection of our selfish way and locked in our incapacity of changing. As an artist I am on a quest, I question, and I try... I love the simple and naive idea that we can create a better world. Utopia or "idea-topia" (as someone mentioned recently to me) need to be allowed in order to change the perception of progress. This installation plays with time. It is our present but also a vision of the future, a play with the old myths.



Primitive, 2019, wood. Courtesy the artist

M.E: The female figures seem to be linked in trajectory from child (ORO) to womanhood (central figure in the midst of the broken shell) finally the act of procreation in *Lovers of Pompeii* (2019). I wondered if the cycle of life as we know it is here shown as quite predetermined and if you see any chance of agency either individual or collective?



Le Marseillais, 2019, HDPE recycled plastic, stainless steel polished mirror, 2.2 x 0.6 x 0.8 m. Courtesy the artist

Cyril: Science allows us to distance our-self from the natural cycles and question this relationship. We are only an addition to ecosystems that fulfill a much larger one. The Anthropocene era is the consequence of our evolution and disregard of natural balances...and this, in a society dominated by men.

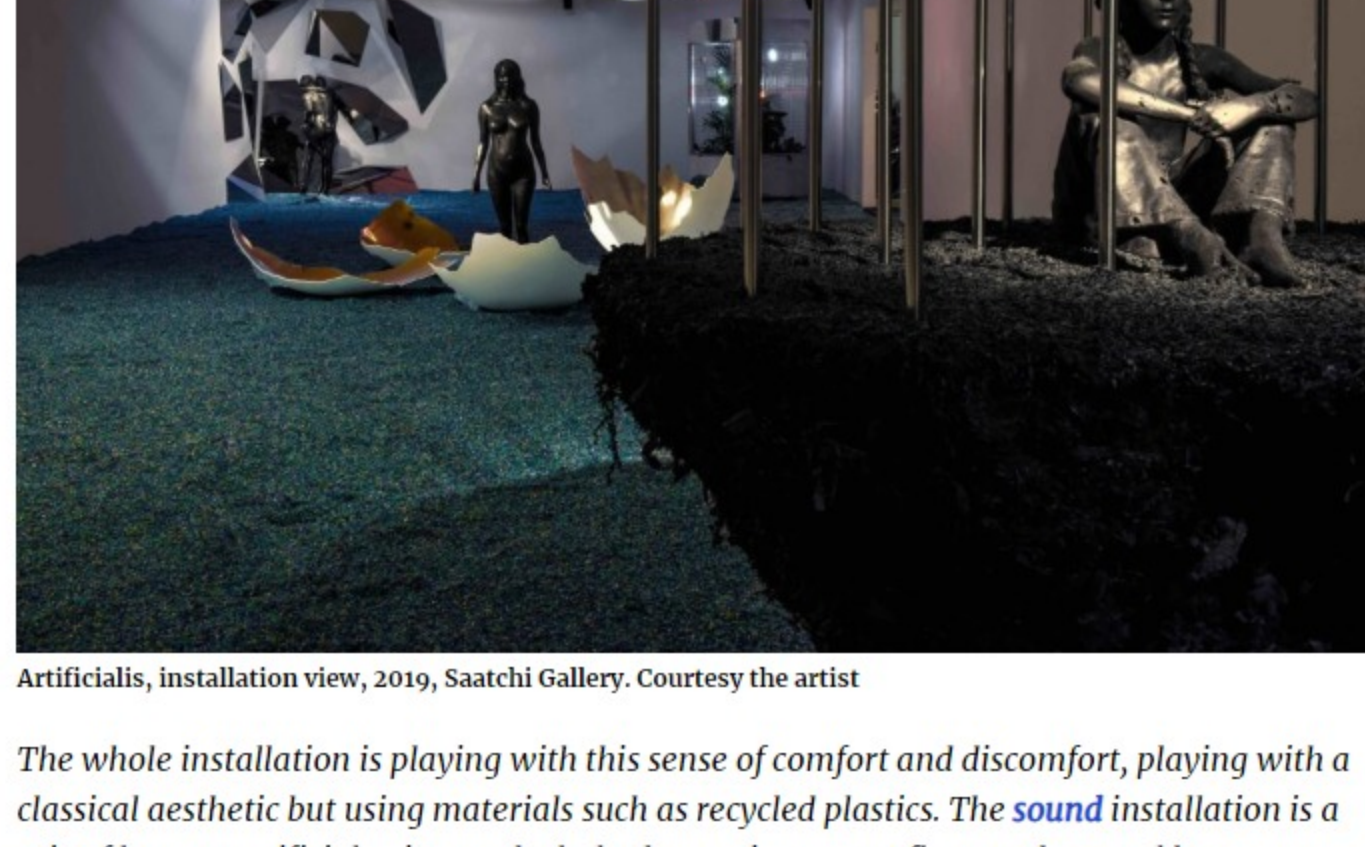
M.E: In terms of the installation as a whole it's ironic in some ways that it creates an immersive and visually pleasurable experience, since it's the state of being immersed, hopelessly so that creates many of the problems you reflect on. In this way I felt both attracted to it as an experience but that there is an underlying feeling of dread which I also enjoyed. The assemblage O2 (2019) is quite beautiful but it's also caud foliage and I wondered if you are implying that we get some strange pleasure from quickening our own demise, some odd death drive a kind of romance to the tragedy?



O2, 2019, metal cage, neon, tropical plants, 1.22 x 1.22 x 2.45 m. Courtesy the artist.

Cyril: The tragedy is always part of our narration. In O2 each neon represents gas or particles of pollution. We are affecting tomorrow, and in 1000 years. Our daily comfort is born out of an ultra liberalism form of progress. This quest for this fabled concept represented for example in some of the American way of life images remain a source of inspiration, a goal for most but in the same time destroy the possibility of experiencing it. It is fantastically masochistic.

We have power to create life and destroy it in a way that never existed before. We became "god" or almost...we are myths...and tragedy might be at the center.



Artificialis, installation view, 2019, Saatchi Gallery. Courtesy the artist

The whole installation is playing with this sense of comfort and discomfort, playing with a classical aesthetic but using materials such as recycled plastics. The sound installation is a mix of human artificial voices and whales lamenting, water flow, and natural low frequencies sound... it is a constant perception of a world in transition, it plays with our sense of joy yet creates discomfort.

Homo Artificialis

M.E: I wanted to end on a positive and you have used the term 'Homo Artificialis' which you speculate is the evolved or next stage of human development, one which will have potential artificial intelligence. do you see this as something inevitable? Is this a positive potentiality and in regards to 'new myths' will this be the role of the artist or somehow incorporated into science?

Soon the young generation will drag individuals, old CEO and politicians in front of court. Already we are starting to do so for cities, states, for not respecting the basic 1948 human right of access of clear water, clean air, unpolluted soil etc (Cyril de Commarque)

Cyril: The homo sapiens as it has been since Lascaux, is maybe on its way out. The genetically modification of our race has been tested in China, the upgrading of the brain is almost there, Elon Musk proposed to communicate with our computer directly without our hand or voices. I am wondering when tomorrow if de facto our brain will be accessible and controllable by computer or others, will the essence of our creativity be affected?

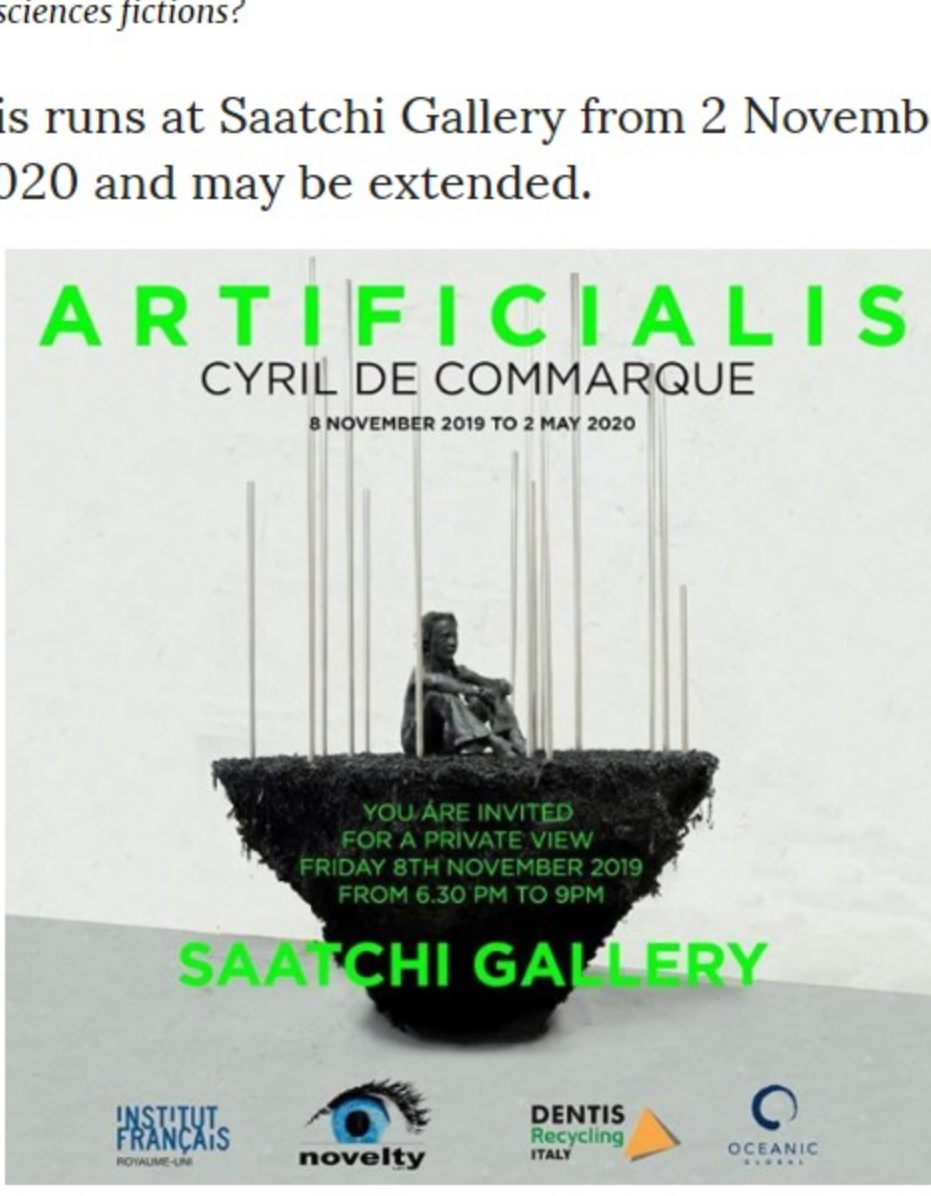
If we lose the individuality, controlled the minds, and pre control the thoughts, we might lose the necessity for any myths, they will have no function.

I am organising a series of talks at Institut Français and the 30th January theme is AI the loss of freedom.

On the other side we are living in a 'New Renaissance' to use the expression of Prof. Ian Goldin from Oxford Martin University. The incredible aspect of this evolution, the level of information and communication offer us the power of change. Our evolution is a decision. We are all politic, and all responsible for our actions. This can be the benefit of this acceleration of progress if we don't forget the social and environmental contract which are the base of our human rights. Soon the young generation will drag individuals, old CEO and politicians in front of court. Already we are starting to do so for cities, states, for not respecting the basic 1948 human right of access of clear water, clean air, unpolluted soil etc.

Will the Homo Artificialis be free, responsible, in harmony in a peaceful utopic ecosystem, or are images of sciences fictions?

Artificialis runs at Saatchi Gallery from 2 November – 1 March 2020 and may be extended.



Saatchi Gallery Duke of York's HQ,

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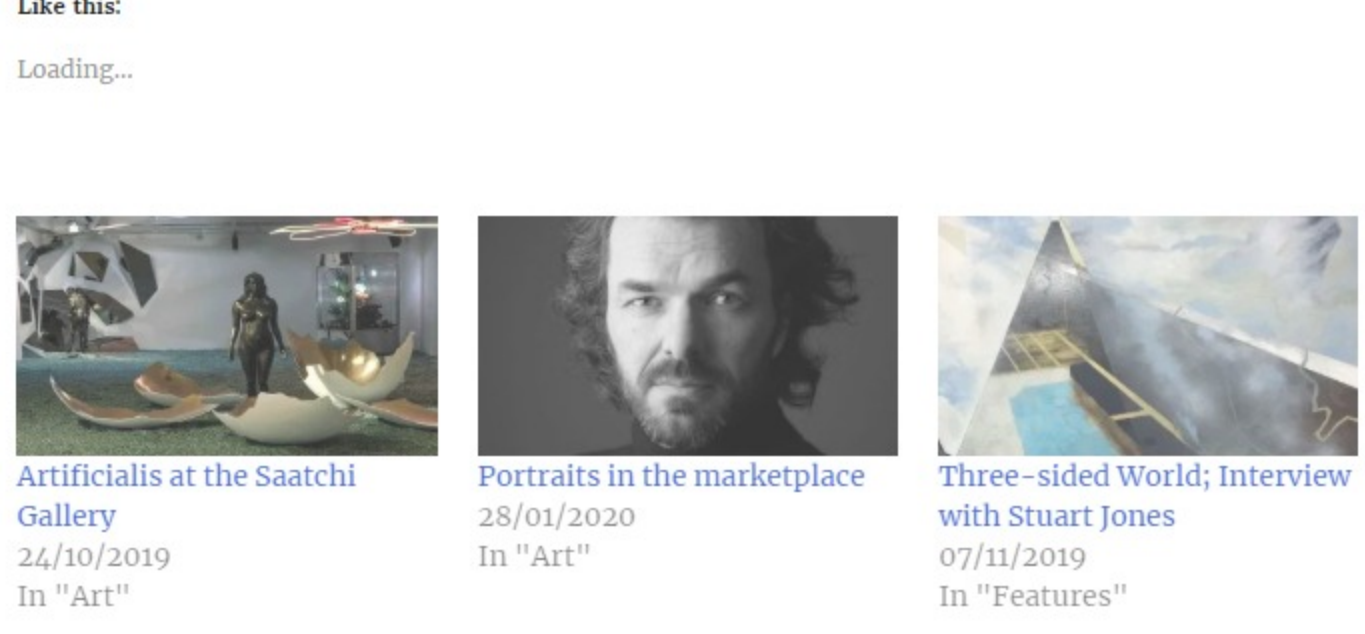
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Artificialis at the Saatchi Gallery

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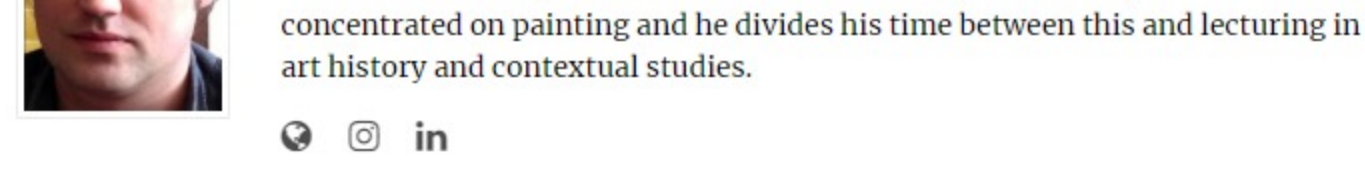
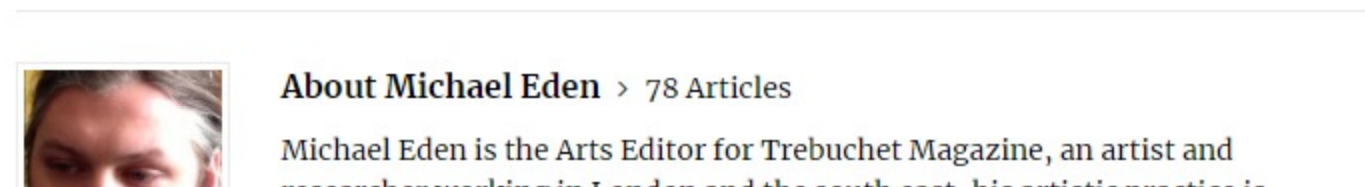
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Michael Eden is the Arts Editor for Trebuchet Magazine, an artist and researcher working in London and the south east, his artistic practice is concentrated on painting and he divides his time between this and lecturing in art history and contextual studies.



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